



Emma Brooke
The Superfluous Woman

Published anonymously in 1894, “A Superfluous Woman” quickly became one of the most widely read of the “New Woman” novels that appeared at the end of the 19th century. At the opening of the story, we find Jessamine Halliday, a pampered young aristocrat, languishing and apparently close to death. Her desperate family has called in a maverick doctor, who recognizes that she suffers from the idleness and listlessness too often experienced by upper-class English women. The only “medicine” she needs is a change of thinking and new self-awareness. Accordingly, the doctor coaches her to think more critically about her role as a woman and about the uses of meaningful labor. (Partly, this doctor is a spokesperson for the author: Emma Brooke was prominently engaged in feminist and socialist thought.)

Jessamine tries to radically re-invent herself by fleeing London (and a looming high-society marriage), to seek humble work as a farm helper in Scotland. It turns out, however, that it is not so easy to cast off the assumptions and controls of a lifetime. (Summary by Bruce Pirie)

Read by Bruce Pirie. Total running time: 11:06:07

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